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USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

FROM : AmEmbassy GUATEMALA

DATE: January 12, 1979

SUBJECT: Monthly Report on Violence and Human Rights:
November 1978

REF :

SUMMARY. (U) Statistically November exceeded October, the previous recent high month, in the number of deaths. The press reported more "death squad" type killings (26) in November than previously. Another 37 deaths seemed to have political overtones. Disappearances were significant, the most notable being that of student leader Antonio CIANI (78 Guatemala 6712). Guerrilla activity was scant. No further killings have been credited to the so-called Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA). The government maintained its "law and order" profile by refusing unions a permit to demonstrate on technical grounds and has kept up pressure on government worker associations suspected of "subversive" tendencies. Vice President VILLAGRAN KRAMER launched President L'JAS' "social pact" concept intended to bring labor peace to Guatemala (78 Guatemala 6686). End Summary.

(U) GOVERNMENT-RELATED VIOLENCE. Several writs of habeas corpus were presented in November alleging unlawful police detention. In none of the following cases did the police admit that they were detaining the person named in the writ. A lawyer presented a writ for Julio Cesar RODENAS Ovando who allegedly had been seized October 31 together with Eva;isto PEREZ Dávila by armed men driving a car with official plates. The writ noted that Pérez later turned up in court, but that Rodenas had not. According to press reports, writs were also presented on behalf of Juan José TAQUE Chavez and Arturo DIEMECK (sic). Police denied Taque's mother's contention that he was picked up by plainclothes police. Police reported finding the body of José Arturo HURTADO Diemeck together with that of another reputed criminal on a farm about ten kilometers from the capital. Police suggested the possibility of a gangland feud as the bodies of six persons with prison records turned up within two days..

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REVIEWED BY

DATE

RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE

TS AUTH.

REASON(S)

ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐DECLASSIFIED ☐ RELEASABLE ☒RELEASE DENIED ☐

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A-02

Page 2 of 5

The bodies of two secondary students turned up near Palín in Escuintla Department. Relatives charged, and police denied, that the police had seized them. The mother of one of the them stated that her son had been arrested twice before for minor offences.

On the heels of the slaying of student leader Oliverio CASTANEDA (78 Guatemala 6243), another student leader, Antonio CIANI Garcia, Organization Secretary of the San Carlos University Students' Association (AEU), disappeared on his way home from school (78 Guatemala 6712). Police, the President and the Minister of Government denied knowledge of Ciani's whereabouts.

(U) GUERRILLA-RELATED VIOLENCE. On November 5 a police unit chanced upon a group distributing subversive propaganda in downtown Guatemala city. When the police moved in to apprehend them, shooting broke out. Three guerrillas escaped, but one was wounded and committed suicide. One policeman died and another was wounded, as was a pedestrian. In a bulletin, the EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) identified the dead guerrilla as Roberto SUC Juc, a member of the propaganda unit of its Frente Otto René Castillo.

A dozen armed men killed the owner of the Finca (farm) Mosquito near Barillas, Huehuetenango, on November 23. The EGP on December 27 issued a bulletin stating that they had executed Humberto SAENZ (also reported as Jose Alberto SAENZ), owner of the finca, for collaborating with the Army against the campesinos. The bulletin also mentioned several rallies they had staged in hamlets in the Ixcán area spanning the El Quiché/Huehuetenango border, one of which was the reported takeover of San Ramón (see October report).

On November 21, the brothers OBREGON were kidnapped by unknown persons from their residence in San Antonio Suchitepéquez. According to press reports, they were linked to an "extreme rightist" political party (unnamed). The kidnap vehicle was later found with the guerrilla initials "EGP" painted on the doors. The two Obregons have not been heard from and the identity of the kidnappers has not been confirmed.

(U) OTHER VIOLENCE. Some 26 deaths fall into the category of probable "death squad" victims, 8 of whom were strangled. (Generally "death squad" victims are killed by .45 cal. or 9mm weapons, the kind sometimes used by government security forces, although some clandestine groups carry such weapons illegally.) Seventeen other bodies were not identified, but bore traces of torture or other suggestion of political motive.

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A-02

Page 3 of 5

There were about 15 deaths where the victim's identity suggested a political backdrop. Six were campesinos, one a small landowner, one an ex-detective, one a comisionado militar (unpaid army recruiter and informant), one an aide to a comisionado militar, one an assistant to a mayor, one a teacher, and one municipal official and MLN member. In the case of the mayoral aide who was from the Cahabón area in Alta Verapaz, a nephew charged that he had been killed by the "ruling class" because he "defended campesinos."

There were a number of kidnappings or disappearances. Jesús MARROQUIN Castañeda, a law professor at San Carlos University and attorney for land disputants in Santa María Xalapán, Jalapa, was shot and hospitalized. Leftist organizations charged his attack was related to his efforts on behalf of the campesinos. He had been a target of terrorists a year ago when he was briefly kidnapped.

In Colombá, Quezaltenango, Enrique RIMOLA Albúrez, a leader of the local Revolutionary Party and coordinator for the Lucas Front, was kidnapped following earlier death threats. No further word has been received about him or Víctor Manuel RENDON, kidnapped ex-policeman from San Antonio Suchitepéquez.

(LOU) HUMAN RIGHTS ATMOSPHERICS. Demonstrations seem to have come to a halt in Guatemala, at least momentarily. The government denied a march permit to CNUS (a leftist labor confederation) on technical/legal grounds. Union leaders called the denial "government repression" and said rather than risk violence they were calling off the demonstration. The march had been called to protest the disappearance of student leader Ciani, government moves to reduce the numbers of sidewalk peddlers, and "to show solidarity with campesinos from Santa María Xalapán as well as in Olopa who have been unjustly ousted from their land."

(Comment. CNUS does not have the necessary legal standing to apply for a parade authorization, but had the protest leaders been serious they could have used member certified unions to apply or arranged for the AEU to request permission. One reason the government insists on a permit is to have someone legally responsible for the actions of the protestors. Possibly some labor organizations were not willing to accept that responsibility. Then, too, it is possible that people have grown tired of protest marches and union leaders found it more politic to cancel the meeting and to blame the government for the cancellation rather than to attribute the cancellation to lack of interest. At any rate, there have been no calls for demonstrations since then.)

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A-02
Page 4 of 5

Police hampered efforts of teacher associations to hold what the latter called "a Central American teachers meeting on educational matters." The government expressed its suspicions about the meeting and ordered the police to keep an eye on the teachers. The Minister of Education initially denied authorization for government facilities to be used for the meeting on the grounds that a Belizean delegation had been invited "which contravenes the Constitution." When teachers insisted on meeting, the government ordered the police out to keep close tabs on the gathering (78 Guatemala 6686).

Complaints of government repression against campesinos made headlines most of November (and December). Of principal concern were charges by CNIUS and other groups that Mobile Military Police (PMAs) had killed over 100 campesinos in Olopa (Chiquimula Department) in the past year on orders of local landlords. However, as the story continued to unfold in the press, it became evident that the issues were not all that cut and dried and that basically the dispute was between campesino groups. Some who had been ousted from the area years ago and others who had now run out of farm land in their own locality had been moving into the Olopa area, squeezing out the current groups farming the land. The army had supported the latter groups against the "land invaders." The situation in Santa María Calapán is similarly between campesino groups.

Up in Panzós, Alta Verapaz, the site of last May's clash between troops and Indian campesinos, the situation is still unresolved despite an agreement between landowners and campesinos to abide by an accord set up with the help of the Guatemalan Congress. Some 50 campesinos came to the capital to protest to the university legal aid office (bufete popular) of police harassment and efforts by landowners to force campesinos off highly-prized Polochic River bottom land. (Comment: The Embassy tried earlier to learn more about the Panzós situation through the bufete's representative on a Panzós investigation committee. However, the Communist FASGUA representative intervened to prevent such a meeting. FASGUA is a labor federation representing some of the campesinos in the Panzós area. More recently the Embassy did learn from congressmen that delimitation of boundaries remained a serious problem in the Panzós area, hampering efforts to achieve a definitive solution to the land dispute.)

Meanwhile, Vice President VILLAGRAN KRAMER announced efforts to develop a "social pact" to bring peace to Guatemala. He credited President LIICAS with the idea which is still quite vague, but essentially represents the opening of a dialogue with contending groups in the Guatemalan society. Initially it was supposed that all factions and interests would be represented, but it now appears that the dialogue will be limited "to bringing employers and workers together to resolve differences peacefully." Local reaction has been skeptical.

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A-02

Page 5 of 5

Although some commentators have suggested that the University of San Carlos (USAC) would necessarily have a key role in the development of a "social pact," President Lucas seemed to have foreclosed this in a public blast denouncing USAC as a "hotbed of subversion...directed at overthrowing my government." University officials denied this was the case. The President's view is not accepted by all of his supporters. Revolutionary Party leader, Roberto ALEJOS, Vice President of Congress and a leader in the government congressional coalition, told the press he did not share the President's view, whereas a spokesman for the rightist MLN hastened to agree with Lucas' position.

The newspaper Nuevo Diario carried a resolution by the Costa Rican Congress lamenting the violence in Guatemala such as the attempt on Christian Democrat Rene DE LEON SCHLOTTER (78 Guatemala 6039) and the killing of student leader Castañeda (78 Guatemala 6243). The resolution, among other things, proposed that the "Human Rights Commission of the Latin American Parliament" meeting in Mexico November 9-10 look into the matter and issue a pronouncement. Nothing further has been reported on that meeting or the resolution.

Mose Harvey of the "Institute of Modern International Studies" (and formerly of INR) told the press of his belief that Guatemalan insurgency is a matter of interest to the Soviet Union, citing an article in the Soviet review "Latin America" linking recent Guatemalan labor unrest with events in Nicaragua. Guatemalan Minister of Government, Donaldo ALVAREZ, was quick to agree with Harvey, noting that he had been saying the same thing himself for some time.

Elections were held in Guatemala in November to choose mayors for Escuintla (Guatemala's fourth largest city) and Los Amates (Izabal), and municipal council members for Lanquin (Alta Verapaz). The turnout was very light even by recent standards. There were no incidents or serious charges of fraud. The leftist FUR of Colom Argueta won in Escuintla as had been expected; the pro-government PR won in Lanquin. In Los Amates, the Christian Democrat candidate won an uncontested election. A candidate of the rightist MLN had won last March, but was shot and killed before taking office. The MLN decided not to "risk" another candidate and refused to participate.

The Guatemalan delegation opposed the Soviet-sponsored proposal before UNESCO calling for increasing state control of international news dissemination. The local press gave wide coverage to the controversy and generally applauded the Guatemalan government's action.

(D) STATISTICS. November was an unusually violent month. Twenty-six deaths bore "death squad" earmarks. Another 37 were probably politically motivated. Of the latter, 11 were in Guatemala City, 11 were in the Oriente, 10 took place in the Indian highlands (a higher than usual proportion), 4 in the Pacific lowlands, and 1 in Izabal.

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